

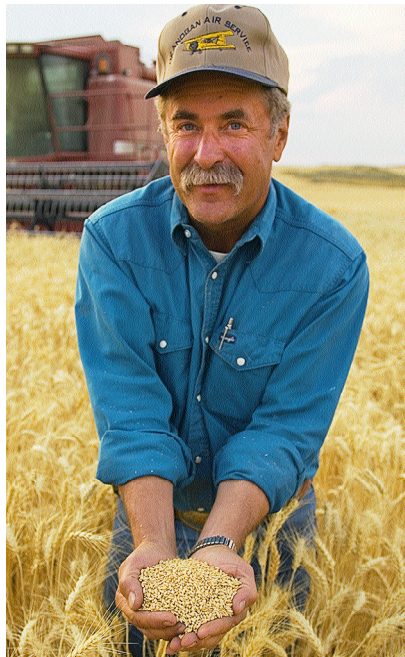
# DOUBLE J RANCH

Sometimes you *can* go home again. When Peter Goldmark left his family's ranch in the Okanogan Valley to go away to college, he didn't think he would ever come back. When he earned an advanced degree in molecular biology and was offered a job at Harvard, he was off and running on a different path. But before he started that job, he brought his wife back to the Double J Ranch for their honeymoon, and they never left.

"There are a lot of people who spend their lives at the bench, at the desk, or at the office, so they can run away on the weekend to get a little bit of what we have here all the time," explains Peter. "So we learn to deal with the economic stresses and appreciate every moment of living out on this land."

Peter's father and mother purchased the property after World War II from the original homesteaders. He says, "My parents lived here about 20 years and I have been here 32 years. Times were tough when they started. Some days were just flat out impossible; if the wind was blowing and it was minus 20 degrees and you were trying to keep the pipes in the house from freezing and feed and water the cattle, it was an exhausting experience." Still, it

was home. Peter declares, "Once you grow up here, nothing else is really comfortable, and that is why I am here now."



Peter's parents had run a cow-calf and wheat operation. They had been gone from the ranch for ten years when he took it over. He recalls, "The place was kind of run down. It had been run by non-owners, which is often hard on an operation." There was a lot of rehabilitation to do, especially in terms of soil conservation.

Since Peter's takeover, the cattle operation has evolved into a grass finished yearling operation. He explains, "We are working on developing local and distant markets for grass-fed cattle. We feel very strongly about the nutritional and sustainable values of raising animals in this way. They are free-ranging on native grass, and when they are sacrificed it is done in a very respectful manner." While Double J Ranch sells mostly to local consumers, they are developing a website to direct

market their beef across the country.

Thirty miles of fencing and cross-fencing mean that Peter rotates cattle over the ground, never grazing heavily in one spot. He







explains, “We’ve added pasture ground so that we can avoid the trap that many other landowners fall into during a dry year when the grass resource suffers from overstocking.”

Peter is also interested in sustaining the native grass species that have thrived in this particular climate over generations. “Native grasses are really important, they are so well adapted to this arid semi-desert ecosystem,” he says. Peter’s father chose this location because it was one of the last areas of native bunchgrass in the Pacific Northwest. Because he was careful not to overgraze, the stands have been maintained. Peter explains, “The great value of bunchgrass is stability and ability to cover the ground reliably even during dry periods. When you take out the bunchgrass, you get invasive species. I think those bunch grass stands are beyond valuable, so I take great care of them. Even in a drought year, I’ll only use it lightly, and if necessary, I’ll cut down my herd size to fit the season.”

The 8000-acre ranch is almost evenly divided between pasture and cultivated ground. But while cattle prices are setting new highs, wheat is the same price it was in the early 1970s. The main change Peter has implemented in the wheat operation is minimizing the amount of summer fallow, because summer fallow is when the land is most susceptible to erosion. He explains, “This was almost always summer fallow–winter wheat country, but having half of the land exposed to wind and water erosion was

unacceptable to me, so I added two crops of spring wheat into that rotation. It gives me three crops in four years instead of two.” It also keeps the land covered in stubble an additional year, so it is fallow only one year out of four instead of two. Cross slope



farming and water control structures are also employed to conserve the soil.

Wildlife also has a place at Double J Ranch. “We’ve got things that fly, things that crawl, and things that run, and we enjoy them all,” Peter says. “There are a lot of hawks and eagles here that do a lot of work for us and we appreciate that. Rodents can be a big problem when you have a mixed operation of pasture and field, so from a pragmatic standpoint, predators of rodents work in our favor.” Double J Ranch has 160 acres that have been kept as

wildlife preserves for 30 years and these areas provide habitat for bear, deer, game birds, and many other species.

In the late 1980s Peter had the opportunity to go back into research at Washington State University. He began researching the



genetics of wild plant species to understand how seeds were able to remain dormant, with a long-term view of understanding seed dormancy as a possible weed control opportunity. In 1994, Peter decided to get into wheat breeding. He says, “Today we are on the cusp of releasing the next generation of wheat varieties—wheat that is winter hard, and resistant to foot rot and snow mold.” Peter welcomed the opportunity to integrate science into his life again. He says, “It has been really rewarding to have the opportunity to bring both parts of my life together: the scientific part and the agricultural part. Through the wheat-breeding program, I am actually able to do something that has application

not just here, but in other parts of the state. I finally found a way to do science here on the ranch.”

Peter’s work in wheat breeding draws on his farming experience as much as his scientific background. “I think the talent is in

selecting plants and stands that are going to be productive, resilient, and successful,” he explains. “I think I bring a rather unique blend of some understanding and talent in the science arena and a tremendous wealth of experience. Ever since the age of ten I have been riding a wheat combine every summer, and that brings innate knowledge of the wheat plant and what is successful and what is not successful.”

In addition to farming, ranching and wheat breeding, Peter serves on a handful of statewide boards, and even did a stint as the director of the Washington Department of Agriculture. He says, “I am

enthusiastic about the opportunity of finding ways to put value on products other than just what the mass market will provide. I don’t want to be a producer just for the lowest cost; I don’t think there is any future in that for agriculture or anybody else.”

“There are better things in life than money,” Peter insists, “and leaving the resource better than you found it is one thing we all should strive to do. What is unusual about this region is that it is so young: the homesteaders only came here in 1918. My heavens, we haven’t even been here 100 years! So we have the opportunity to treat it right.”